



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WSDA begins annual gypsy moth hunt

OLYMPIA – The annual hunt for gypsy moths in Washington is underway.

By mid-July state workers will hang more than 21,000 small cardboard tent traps in trees and shrubs around the state. Their purpose: catch the gypsy moth, one of the worst forest pest insect ever brought into the U.S.

Traps are being placed in all 39 Washington counties.

The traps will be checked every two to three weeks between July and September. If any moths are caught during this period, more traps will immediately be brought into the area to pinpoint the infestation. If enough moths are caught in an area, and other evidence of gypsy moth activity is detected, the state will consider a treatment next spring to eradicate the infestation.

The traps will be taken down in September.

Gypsy moths were brought to the U.S. in 1869 and got loose by accident. Permanent populations are now established in 19 states in the East and upper Midwest. The moth -- in its caterpillar form -- attacks more than 500 species of trees and shrubs, causing millions of dollars of damage each year to the environment and economy.

About \$1 million is spent each year in Washington on gypsy moth trapping and eradication. The state and federal government share the cost.

The first gypsy moth was caught in Washington in 1974. The first eradication treatment took place in 1979. Since then a total of 76 treatments have been conducted. All have been successful. Permanent populations of moths have never been established in the state, unlike the 19 other states that suffer from periodic outbreaks.

Traps are normally placed at a density of one per square mile. Ports, waterways, and areas where moths have been caught in the past are trapped more heavily.

The number of traps being placed in the 39 Washington counties are: 5,000 in King; 2,200 in Pierce; 1,200 in Lewis; 1,100 in Snohomish and Whatcom; 1,000 in Thurston; 850 in Clark; 800 in Clallam; 750 in Cowlitz, Jefferson, and Kitsap; 700 in Grays Harbor and Skagit; 600 in Mason; 400 in Island, Pacific, and Skamania; 300 in Klickitat; 275 in Spokane; 250 in Okanogan; 225 in Wahkiakum and Yakima; 175 in Chelan; 125 in Benton; 100 in Ferry, San Juan, Stevens, and Walla Walla; 75 in Grant, Kittitas, and Pend Orielle; 50 in Douglas, Franklin, Lincoln, and Whitman; and 25 in Adams, Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield.

There are two kinds of gypsy moth -- the European variety and the Asian variety. The Asian moth is a much greater threat to Washington because it eats both evergreen and deciduous trees, and the Asian female moth, unlike its European counterpart, can fly. The flight capability of the Asian female moth makes it very difficult to pinpoint Asian infestations.

The number of moths caught each summer in Washington varies widely. The number has ranged from a high of 1,315 in 1983, to a low of 17 in 2002. The number caught last summer was 59.

For more information on WSDA's gypsy moth control program, visit the WSDA Web site at www.agr.wa.gov, and click on "gypsy moth;" or call our toll-free hotline at (800) 443-6684.

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